

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Child Poverty Council

FROM: Patricia Moulton Powden, Commissioner
Vermont Department of Labor

DATE: December 2, 2009

SUBJECT: Update to the report of the Council

I am pleased to provide you with this update on the progress made to date in advancing the recommendations of the Child Poverty Council. This memo is a joint response from Commissioner Steve Dale and me as it pertains to the collaborative efforts of the Department for Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Labor (VDOL).

This listing of activities represents specific steps taken to implement the recommendations of the Council. While progress is being made, efforts to include adults and children living in poverty in state and federally financed training activities is ongoing. Further, the need to continue to design programs specifically targeted to that population is never ending. Our experiences with these efforts continue to inform us on better ways to reach participants and most important, better ways to enhance participants likelihood of success.

VDOL AND DCF JOINT INITIATIVES:

Working Bridges: VDOL has also been a partner in the establishment of United Way's initiative to establish a "resource coordinator" pilot project based on the concepts of the "Working Bridges" program. Working Bridges is a series of best practices in human resources to hire and retain employees coming from generational poverty and help them achieve success in the workplace. The Resource Coordinator program is a component of Working Bridges and has proven very successful as a two year pilot project with five employers from Chittenden and Washington Counties. Under the current model, the resource coordinator is available on a scheduled basis at the participating employers' worksites to assist workers with non-work issues that are impacting their attendance or ability to focus on work activities. The coordinator has helped individuals to resolve issues related to housing; transportation; child and elder care; financial problems; and accessing state resources such as fuel assistance, health insurance, and food stamps. The coordinator lays the groundwork for a solution, while using the situation to teach the employee how to develop their own problem-solving skills and resources for the future. In addition to one-on-one meetings, the coordinator delivers informational seminars to workers and their supervisors to advise them of helpful resources and how to access them.

Another element to the program is the establishment of a revolving loan program employees can access to borrow up to \$1,000 to pay for car repairs, new tires, traffic fines, rent deposits or other immediate needs for cash that enhance that employee's ability to stay on the job. The employee pays back the loan through payroll deductions. In one employer's case, approximately 40% of participating employees asked to continue the payroll deduction even after the loan was repaid to create a savings account to fund future needs. The program has proven to be very successful at reducing turnover of many of the entry level jobs which are often taken by folks living in or close to poverty.

The resource coordinator concept is proving so successful that VDOL is looking at two potential ways to expand and enhance the project.

- In a recent application submitted in response to an ARRA SGA for Health Care Occupations, VDOL included a request to fund a full time resource coordinator to work on-site with the health care providers who are employer and training partners in the application. Our intent is to use the exact same model as above, with particular emphasis on employers who will train and hire entry level health care workers, where we see the greatest need for this kind of post-hire support. We see this as an invaluable resource in ensuring that training investments lead to successful long-term careers.
- An application is being developed for possible funding under the Workforce Education & Training Fund (WETF), to enhance the Working Bridges concept through a next-step training of front-line supervisors. If approved, the project would develop, pilot, and disseminate a supervisory training model for managers and supervisors who are familiar with the concepts of Working Bridges, but lack the experience and practical knowledge to introduce effective practices in their workplace. The program would include examples, exercises, case studies and other tools that address common workplace communication and relationship breakdowns that often lead to disciplinary action and high turnover, particularly in workplaces with diverse economic and cultural backgrounds.

We are continually investigating additional resources to fund additional resource coordinators with suitable employers. We have considered the Next Generation/WETF as a resource to fund the resource coordinator positions but this need does not fit the stated purpose of the WETF in current law. We have also built resources in to a federal grant request and hope to continue to explore ways to fund these initiatives. The goal is to have state and/or federal resources "seed" the program by funding the first year fully with public funding decreasing over a three to five year period with employers eventually picking up 100% of the cost. The program is much more cost effective for smaller employers if the cost of one resource coordinator is shared amongst 3-5 employers.

SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (SYEP): Each year the Vermont Department of Labor has funding, typically limited to fund summer youth employment programs for youth ages 14-21, to find opportunities to learn and earn wages during the summer months. USDOL used to provide substantial funding for this program which ended several years ago. We have utilized a portion of our formula Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds to provide competitive grants to youth organizations, schools, non-profits, and others to provide employment and training opportunities for youth. Annual

funding has ranged between \$125,000 to \$150,000 in a given year. Under the American Reinvestment and Re-Employment Act (ARRA), Summer Youth programs were greatly expanded with \$2.2 million in one-time funding to enable competitive grants. The message from USDOL was clear to spend it all during the summer of 2009. In addition, federal law changed the eligible ages to 14-24. The target populations are disadvantaged youth including those living in poverty, dislocated workers, veterans, and out of school youth who are eligible for WIA. The focus of this money is work experience, assisting youth in gaining work skills, and ultimately preparing them to enter the workforce. Stimulus funds also have an emphasis on serving older (18-24 years old) and out-of-school youth who are eligible for WIA (Workforce Investment Act) funds. In addition to the competitive grants, we retained funds to enable individual placements of disadvantaged youth in summer youth opportunities.

The response to the ensuing Request for Proposals was overwhelming; we received over 80 proposals totaling almost 6 times the amount of money we had to award. With the influx of the stimulus funds, combined with VDOL's normal Summer Employment Opportunity funds, the department enrolled approximately 1,000 Vermont youth this summer.

Below is a summary of the grants made. This summary was prepared after the awards and refers to future activity. We are pleased to report each grant performed at or above expectations.

Weatherization Camps, Vermont Technical College, Randolph. Participants ages 18-24 were recruited to learn weatherization job skills during two, two week residential camps. Hands on training in weather stripping, insulation, ventilation, glazing and caulking, and air sealing will be offered in two sessions. Upon completion, participants received employer recognized certifications.

COVER Home Repair, Hartford recruited up to 20 eligible youth from the Upper Valley Region to be a part of the COVER Youth Corps which will complete 12 weatherization projects and 4 wheelchair ramps. Participants will spend 20 hours a week on job sites and 4 in the classroom working on job readiness skills.

Families First, Wilmington. 12 young people will work at the Guilford Church program responding to community needs: stacking wood, gardening, and yard work for the elderly. Another 12 with developmental disabilities will work on business development plans for a recycling business and a reading program for daycare centers and libraries. Projects will also include classroom time working on job readiness and recreational activities. 6 youth will be hired to assist at the Boys and Girls Club's summer camps.

Media Technology Institute, Lyndon Center, will use ARRA funds to support the *Broadcast Journalism Camp* for high technology skill development of 12 young adults between the ages of 16-24 with the final outcome of full-time employment in technology based positions with Northeast Sports Network, Inc.

Montpelier Parks: Historic Preservation Training Program, Montpelier, will host a work crew of 10 older youth (18-24) to restore the Hubbard Park Observation Tower in Montpelier. They will learn specialized trades related to historic preservation, including erecting scaffolding, power-washing, cleaning, and re-pointing mortar, in addition to general work readiness skills.

Northeast Kingdom Community Action, Inc. will place younger out-of-school youth, at risk youth, and older out-of-school youth at a variety of employers in the Northeast Kingdom. All will complete formal and informal assessments which will result in an Individual Service Strategy. Participants will develop a portfolio to use in future job searches.

Northeast Kingdom Human Services, Inc., St. Johnsbury, will organize approximately 20 youth into work crews that will: maintain St. Johnsbury, Lyndonville, and Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital walking/hiking trails, assist the Weed and Seed Club in landscape, repair and paint local alternative schools, plant and maintain community gardens, create a youth park, and other community activities.

Project SOAR, St. Albans, will place 11 high school students (ages 14-17) and 4 out-of-school youth (18-21) in part-and full-time jobs in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. Younger youth, whose jobs will be mostly part-time, will participate in a four-week intensive outdoor/experiential summer program designed to promote good citizenship, work readiness skills, and leadership. Older youth will participate in the outdoor program for as many hours as they can, depending on their work schedules.

Randolph Technical Career Center, Randolph, will place 12 out-of-school youth (18-24) in jobs that will begin mid-June, with a week of work readiness skill building, and run through September 30. Fifteen youth aged 14-17 will participate in a summer tech camp, which will run for 6 weeks. They will spend each morning in a hands-on program of technical and career education, rotating among various program areas offered by RTCC. Tuition scholarships will be available for participants to attend summer school.

ReCycle North, Burlington/Barre, will enroll 6 out-of-school youth in Burlington who will be YouthBuild participants and/or recent graduates. They will be employed at ReCycle North learning green construction and employability skills. 8 young people will work at the Barre site focusing on construction and weatherization skills. Enrollees will work 35 hours each week and will attend a weekly class focusing on Personal and Professional Development.

Smokey House Center, Danby, will provide work opportunities for 14 youth workers (ages 14-24) to teach the skills, habits, and attitudes necessary for success in the workplace. Youth will work 6 hours a day, for a total of 24 hours a week, for seven weeks from June 30th to August 14th, 2009. Youth will work in 6 member crews, led by a crew leader, at Smokey House Center where they will learn relevant workplace skills including those needed for emerging green jobs.

Sunrise Family Resource Center, Bennington, will run a six-week work readiness and career exploration program to meet the needs of 15 older youth, 18-24, who are pregnant and parenting. All participants will work at local healthcare facilities and will rotate through several departments to learn about the variety of opportunities that exist. They will also participate in work readiness training and assessment.

Tutorial Center, Bennington, will recruit 8 youth, ages 14-24, who will engage in green growing horticultural work for 8 weeks, 20 hours per week. Beginning with a week of goal setting, soft skills awareness, and self-development workshops, it continues with on-the-job work experience and additional workshop sessions. Participants will plant, prune, harvest, and work at the farmers market.

U-32 High School, E. Montpelier, will enroll approximately 17 youth aged 14-22, some of whom require supported employment. After a week of job readiness classes and assessment, participants will be placed on jobsites, many of which will fall into the categories of green jobs and weatherization, for 8 weeks. They will work for 20 hours a week and participate in work readiness skills classes for 1.5 hours per week.

Vermont Works for Women (VWW), Burlington, will place approximately 20 female participants from northern Vermont, ages 16-24, in two fields that are experiencing growth: green jobs/energy efficiency and the culinary arts. One crew, based in Chittenden County, will visit residents (particularly vulnerable populations) and advise them about energy efficiency strategies. This project was modeled after a pilot project sponsored by Efficiency Vermont. VWW will also work with 10 female youth to prepare meals for children enrolled in Winooski City's THRIVE summer program.

Vocational Rehabilitation, Burlington, will create a demonstration project that will engage VocRehab clients, having a wide range of disabilities, ages 18-24, in considering a career in the health care field. Fifteen youth will be placed at Fletcher Allen Health Care where they will participate in training, job shadowing, and work experience opportunities specifically focused on health careers and expanding the scope of opportunities for these young people.

White River Craft Center, Randolph, will recruit 15 Randolph area at risk youth, ages 18-24. The program will include 3 days of orientation focusing on basic work competencies. Beginning June 22, 2009, they will work/train for 30 hours per week for 7 weeks. Two professional contractors will work with participants training them in proper and safe use of tools/protective equipment, woodworking, electrical concepts, and other carpentry and weatherization skills.

Youth Services, Brattleboro, will provide a seven week academic and occupational summer experience for nine WIA eligible youth ages 14-16. This experience will serve needy in-school and out-of-school (25%) youth most at risk. Youth will spend mornings working at various sites around the community; they will then convene with their older counterparts and supervisors to share lunch and life skills building.

Vermont State Parks, statewide, will provide summer and early fall employment opportunities for young adults (ages 18 to 24) for summer work crews. The funding will enable crews for the 2009 and 2010 seasons. For 2009, four crews will perform a variety of maintenance and light construction work in state parks from July through September. Each crew will be led by skilled and experienced trades people (unemployed folks hired to train and supervise the crews) to ensure quality finished work and a valuable outdoor trades oriented learning experience for the crew members. Crews will be stationed in the Groton State Forest (Groton, Peacham, Marshfield), two crews in the Rutland area, and one in North Hero. Examples of work include: log building restoration, roofing, stone fireplace repair, and rustic cabin construction. Materials, tools, supplies, and transportation from a central meeting location are provided. Summer 2010 crew locations will be determined based on state parks need.

Workforce Education and Training Fund/Next Generation:

Over the past two fiscal years, on several occasions, VDOL has exercised its option to grant waivers on the wage requirements that are part of the enacting legislation for Next Generation training projects. Those requirements state that training grants under the Workforce Education & Training Fund (WETF) must lead to jobs paying 200% of Vermont's minimum wage, or 150% plus benefits that equal 200%.

While recognizing the intent of the legislation, and the need to realize a return on our training investment, VDOL also recognizes that many low-income Vermonters need training that will prepare them to successfully enter the workforce before they can move up to higher paid employment. Waivers of the wage requirement are carefully evaluated and have been granted in the following circumstances:

- The population to be served has special needs or characteristics that severely limit their ability to compete for high paid jobs (history of chronic unemployment; limited English proficiency; lack of high school diploma/GED; criminal record, etc.).
- The jobs being trained for are in high demand occupations with historically low wages, **but** offer clearly defined career ladders or opportunities for advancement.
- Training will be offered in a region of high unemployment, or where the cost of living is significantly lower than average; the resulting jobs are secure and offer potential to move up.

Almost every WETF project that trains for new jobs has served some low-income Vermonters, but the following projects were developed with a special focus on serving low-income participants, including TANF recipients, and were designed to include extra support services to ensure trainees' success. In some cases, WETF dollars were coupled with federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding.

We continue to make specific efforts to reach out to Reach Up case managers and Job Developers to notify them of WETF financed training that may be appropriate for Reach Up participation. These efforts are ongoing.

WETF and WIA programs targeted at low-income participants:

1. Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS) received a grant in 2008 to support the wages of homeless individuals to work and train in entry-level part-time jobs with a for-profit Burlington business. Extensive support services were provided, including job coaching and free bus passes to and from work. Unfortunately, only 5 individuals enrolled out of a projected 12, and only two completed. Of the two completers, one was enrolled in a work program at ReCycle North. Another worked with Flash Bags, a new and growing company in Winooski that makes canvas bags and other products. The participant was very successful in training and at last report, was working 35 hours a week and on a waiting list for her own apartment.
2. The Association of Africans Living in Vermont, in partnership with the Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) and Vermont Adult Learning, received a WETF grant to support the training of African refugee and immigrant workers for positions as home care providers with VNA, Armistead, and Home Instead. Training included occupational skills as well as English language instruction specific to home health care situations. These are occupations that offer job security and opportunity for advancement. The program was quite successful, with more than thirty individuals enrolled in training, including several Reach Up participants. Twenty five completed and received certification as home care providers. At least eleven secured full time employment at an average wage of \$10.50/hour.
3. Vermont Works for Women has received several WETF grants in recent years, including one that supported construction skills training for unemployed women in Chittenden County. The eighty hour course included entry level carpentry skills as well as employability and communication skills. The grant also included post employment follow up and support. Eight women were enrolled and all completed. Four of the graduates entered employment following training, at wages ranging from \$11-14/hour.
4. Vermont Foodbank, in partnership with Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf, received a grant to support three sessions of a fourteen-week training program in certified ServSafe food handling and preparation. Training takes place at the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf, and trainees learn how to safely convert donated food from area restaurants and grocery stores into usable meals for low-income Vermonters. The program was designed to train individuals who have experienced chronic unemployment, and classes have been filled primarily with Reach Up participants. Because most students are single parents with young children, intensive support services are built into the program, including integrated soft skills training and mentoring, financial assistance for child care, transportation, and work clothing. In the first two sessions, twenty-three (of a possible 24) students enrolled, and sixteen completed. The third session is still under way, with a full starting class of 12 students. Success has been mixed, with four students securing employment so far, and several other students enrolling in an intensive NECI training program in more advanced culinary skills.

5. Family Center of Northwestern Vermont and Building Bright Futures Council of Lamoille County each received a WETF grant to fund the training of child care workers that will lead to certification as Child Development Associates. The Bright Futures grant also provides money for mentoring and support that will help to keep workers engaged in training and on track to achieve certification. These are occupations that are vital to working families, yet traditionally pay relatively low wages for the level of responsibility. Child care positions are often attractive to young single parents who are seeking employment to support their own families. Training and certification can lead to better paying positions in child care.
6. Career Readiness Certificate: With resources from WETF, Vermont Training Program, and the federally funded Workforce Investment Act, VDOL established a partnership with Community College of Vermont to deliver the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) program on a statewide basis over an eighteen month period that began in January 2009. The CRC program was developed in response to a long standing recognition that certain basic workplace skills are essential to success in any entry level occupation. The sixty-hour classroom training develops (or refreshes) fundamental skills in math and reading literacy, understanding written information, computer skills, and "soft skills" such as work ethic, teamwork, and interpersonal skills. Trainees who complete all six training modules receive a nationally recognized WorkKeys Certificate as well as a CCV Career Readiness Certificate. Training is not limited to low income individuals, but experience shows that most applicants have a limited or unsuccessful work history. Trainees are selected based on the potential for a CRC certificate to enhance their ability to find and retain successful employment.

VDOL AND DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION COLLABORATION:

Industry Education Centers of Excellence: VDOL and the Department of Education have been collaborating on the Industry Education Centers of Excellence (IECE) initiative which is targeted at creating career pathways or ladders in a variety of sectors. The collaboration establishes an industry skills council in a particular industry sector comprised of employers. These employers define the specific skills, skill certifications, and educational and work experience needed to succeed in this career. This then guides the development of curriculum at regional technical centers, high schools, and post secondary educational institutions.

The goal of the IECE initiative is to identify:

- 1) programs of study including sequential standards/performance outcomes, assessments, credentials, courses with multiple exit points, and quality articulation processes ratified by industry, education, and government;
- 2) a low cost effective industry-education-government collaborative model with a results-oriented focus;
- 3) a comprehensive and well-supported internship model with sites identified and committed;
- 4) a modern standards and performance driven course articulation process; and
- 5) an outreach plan.

We have developed skills councils in the hospitality and tourism sectors working collaboratively with the Vermont Hospitality Council of the Vermont State Chamber. A second is in the green building sector working with a variety of green building associations. The hospitality council has completed their first phase of work. The green building sector is just getting started. We will be continuing work in additional sectors. The hope is to partner with an employer/business association to develop the council and provide ongoing support for the work.

Health care career pathways:

The Vermont DOL has applied for up to \$5 million for three years of funding from the U.S. DOL's Employment and Training Administration to support a statewide effort to prepare workers for careers in the health care sector. The plan is to focus our efforts on creating career ladders so that Vermonters have pathways to increase both skills and earnings over a lifetime. There are 4 areas of focus: Nursing, Allied Health, Long-Term Care, and Health Information Technology. As mentioned above, the grant includes provisions for resource coordinators at employers who hire trainees from this program.

This statewide proposal includes the following:

1. **VT Area Health Education Center (AHEC)**, in partnership with VDOL, will provide the recruitment and referral function specific to health care careers. Three regional AHEC's will offer adults the information regarding jobs, skills required, existing training opportunities, and how to navigate the various systems.
2. **PHI (Paraprofessional Health Institute)** will develop introductory training for entry level Personal Care Assistants (PCAs). The demand for these Long Term Care workers in Vermont's near future is very large. This effort will target unemployed workers with limited skills or barriers to employment. We estimate that over 500 PCAs can receive introductory training in the next 3 years. This project component may serve to reduce the number of Vermonters in need of public benefits and other social supports. This work also provides the foundation to the next level of PCA training in Vermont that includes topics such as: client rights, infection control, nutrition, abuse and neglect, more advanced personal care skills, and safety.
3. The **VT Health Care Association** will oversee the provision of online education for Licensed Nursing Assistants. This long-term care worker is the next step in the career ladder from PCA II. We estimate that the collaborative will be able to train 300 employees per year. In addition, specialized dementia care training will be developed for 100 long-term care workers through this partnership.
4. In order for these workers to succeed, a key component of the project is career supports through the efforts of **Vermont Adult Learning** for those with basic educational needs, English as a Second Language training for our immigrant and refugee populations, **Vocational Rehabilitation** for Vermonters with accommodation and special employment needs, and supports for our returning **Veterans**. The **United Way's 'Working Bridges'** project will

provide Resource Counselors in the work setting to support and assist lower wage workers to succeed.

5. **VT HITEC**, in partnership with 8 of Vermont's hospitals, will train information technology workers to service this part of the health care sector. HITEC plans to train over 120 dislocated, unemployed, and underemployed Vermonters to become employed by sponsoring employers. The highlighted jobs for this portion of the grant are medical coders, HIT and HER implementation and practice support specialists. Graduates will be guaranteed full time employment at a minimum salary of \$11/ hour with comprehensive benefit packages.
6. **Community College of Vermont** will offer career readiness certificates and medical assistant training. **Champlain College** will offer certificate and degree based programs in Health Informatics for technicians, and managers of electronic health information systems.
7. The **VT DOL** will provide project management and will be responsible for tracking the outcomes of this grant.

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